



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphisa* (cat. 3)

REFERENCES Charleroi 1975, under no. 31; Lefebvre 2006, pp. 33, 35, 94, 189, fig. 18, as *Une Parisienne*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick, with the grain running horizontally. The panel has chamfers 1.1 cm wide along the back edges, and the reverse is varnished. The panel is very flat with a slight irregularity of plane in the front lower left. There are also mahogany strips (0.6 cm wide) glued and nailed along all four sides, probably to fit a frame. The paint condition is generally good. There are traction cracks in the horizontal gray strokes near the lower edge. Frame abrasion is visible along the left and right edges, and there is a small gouge down to the ground layer in the left background. Evidence of reworking appears along the edges, possibly by the artist, some of which laps onto the added wood strips. There are also old retouches in the hat and hair. The two layers of varnish were applied in vertical brushstrokes and exhibit glassy cracks, some of which have white edges. It is possible that the picture has never been fully cleaned but only revarnished. A minor scratch in the varnish can be seen in the upper right near the hat. The varnish is hazy due to the general crack network and spots in the right background.

The off-white ground layer was probably commercially applied and is visible below the thin paint of the face. No underdrawing was detected under infrared light, although in low magnification, black line work seems to be present in the woman's mouth and hand. The paint consistency is thin to impastoed vehicular, and the technique is completely wet-into-wet, with the background color applied first. A few strokes look like palette-knife work. The brushstroke along the bottom edge may have been an afterthought, applied while the dark paint underneath was still wet, which caused it to crack. The red monogram in the upper right appears to have been applied over a repainted area, where a black wash covers the green background color. This black splashes onto the attached edge strips, which may support the idea that Stevens was involved when the strips were added.

1. Lefebvre 2006, p. 104, identifies the exhibited work as the Antwerp version.
2. Quoted in Lefebvre 2006, p. 104: "Nous étions deux à peindre le monstre."
3. Van Praet's comment was recorded by Arthur Stevens in a letter to Alfred Stevens, 1873, quoted in Lefebvre 2006, p. 104: "Sous cette enveloppe féminine et gracieuse on devine la bête. Si elle descendait de son cadre j'aurais peur. . . je sens qu'elle me dévorerait, qu'elle serait mon maître."
4. Lemonnier 1888, p. 200: "Je ne sais rien de plus impressionnant que le *Sphinx* d'Alfred Stevens; c'est un abîme sous des fleurs. . . Cette étrange créature me fait trembler; ses yeux fauves sont distendus par des appétits effroyables; j'ai peur pour moi-même et ceux qui me sont chers." On its first publication in 1888, Lemonnier's

essay "Mes Médailles: Les Médailles d'en face: Notes sur L'Exposition Universelle de Paris," was dated 1878.

5. Larousse 1866–90, vol. 14, p. 1005: "Personne impénétrable; individu habile à poser des questions difficiles, des problèmes."
6. Quoted in Larousse 1866–90, vol. 12, p. 293: "La beauté de la Parisienne, c'est la beauté du diable; mais cette beauté, qui ne dure que trois ou quatre saisons chez les provinciales, dure un quart de siècle chez la Parisienne. Elle a toujours la beauté du diable, parce qu'elle a toujours le diable, même quand elle va au sermon. . . La Parisienne, quoi qu'elle fasse, est toujours en scène. Si on ne la regarde pas, elle se regarde elle-même. . . La Parisienne est le huitième péché capital, mais son amour est le huitième sacrement."
7. See Lefebvre 2006, p. 105.
8. Huret 1899, p. 41.

325 | *Young Woman by the Sea* 1886

Oil on panel, 40.8 x 24.9 cm

Upper right: a mon jeune ami / Brunet. / AStevens. 86

[AS in monogram]

1955.866

From 1881 onward, Stevens paid regular visits to the Normandy coast and executed many paintings of coastal scenes, some of open views of the sea and shore, others of figures beside the water. In *Young Woman by the Sea*, the background is so broadly sketched, with just two rapidly indicated bathing figures and one or perhaps two sailboats, that we are given no indication of a specific site; rather, the setting acts as a generic background for the figure, placing her in no more precise role than any one of thousands of fashionable vacationers on a northern French beach.

Even within the confines of the image itself, relationships between the elements are not fully defined. The figure is placed beside a chair, but there is no indication of where they are situated; the viewpoint implies that they are somewhat above the sea, and hence perhaps on a terrace or esplanade, but the placement of the horizon line, below the girl's waist, suggests that our viewpoint is very low, and that we are looking up at her. However, the pose of the figure does not suggest that she is looking down at us. Rather, the treatment of the space behind the figure



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shows that the sea is merely an attributive backdrop, rather than an evocation of any actual spatial relationship between the figure and the background. This very informal treatment was presumably appropriate for a small picture that was intended as a gift, in contrast with the greater elaboration of a work such as *Moonlight* (cat. 323), a painting that was probably initially sold via a dealer. However, the treatment of the figure and the suggestion of a background space show that this should be viewed as a subject picture, rather than as a figure study like *Woman in White* (cat. 316).

It is unclear whether the young woman—with her bright red parasol and her head tilted coquettishly to one side—should be viewed as a portrait or a generic type. The dedication ‘A mon jeune ami Brunet’ suggests that it might be a portrait of Brunet’s wife or fiancée, as the sitter is wearing a ring on the third finger of

her left hand, and seems to have removed one of her gloves to make this ring more evident; however, the identity of Brunet, who lent the picture to the Stevens retrospective at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1900, has not been firmly established. JH

PROVENANCE The artist, given to Brunet; Brunet, Paris (1886–until at least 1900); Bultot, Brussels (by 1936); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 9 Feb. 1953]; Robert Sterling Clark (1953–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1900c, no. 35, as *Jeune Femme au bord de la mer*, lent by Brunet; Williamstown 1960b, ill.; Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.

REFERENCES Vanzype 1936, p. 104, no. 114.¹

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick with a vertical grain. The back has shallow chamfered edges 1 cm wide, and the wood has several knots. There are slight undulations in the panel, at both upper and lower edges, perhaps due to tight framing nails. The paint condition is generally quite good. There are splits in the paint and ground layers over the knot locations and several small old losses in the right background at sleeve height. The left and bottom edges show frame abrasion, and there may be slight solvent abrasion in the dress details. Small original details on the right horizon are covered by repaint. The painting was partially cleaned in the figure, leaving cotton lint stuck in the surface coatings. There appear to be several layers of yellowed and cracked varnish, both applied by brush, and strings of undissolved resin scattered on the surface. The ultraviolet light fluorescence is quite dense, though slightly less in the figure, and the surface reflectance is streaky and shiny.

The ground is an off-white commercially applied layer, visible throughout the image. Dark and heavy graphite lines form a very intermittent underdrawing. These short, occasional lines indicate parts of the dress, shoulder line, sleeves, and neck, but do not include the chair. There are gray-brown paint lines around the face, which suggest that an intermediary underpaint sketch may have been used. The final paint is applied wet-into-wet, with very thin scumbles in some areas, giving an almost unfinished quality to the dress, where much of the ground layer remains exposed. The figure, laid in after the background colors, contains some impasto details in the hat and jewelry. The inscription and signature were possibly done in brown ink.

1. *As Jeune fille au bord de la mer*, belonging to M. Bultot, Brussels.